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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000600

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: NLD DECLARES BOYCOTT OF NATIONAL CONVENTION

REF: A. RANGOON 594 (NOTAL)

[B](#). RANGOON 587 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The NLD, failing to secure the release of party leaders ASSK and U Tin Oo, declared publicly on May 14 that the party will not attend the SPDC's National Convention. Burma's leading pro-democracy ethnic coalition will follow suit. However, NLD leaders allow that if the regime chooses to continue bilateral negotiations, the NLD would be prepared to listen. Given that further clarification is unlikely prior to May 17, we advise that in the interim the Department continue calls for the release of NLD leaders and for all parties to be allowed to participate in the reconciliation process, but refrain from direct commentary on the National Convention itself. End comment.

[1](#)2. (U) The National League for Democracy (NLD), at a dramatic May 14 press conference, declared publicly that the party will not participate in the SPDC's National Convention, scheduled to reconvene on May 17. The press conference was attended by international media stringers, over two hundred NLD supporters, numerous ethnic party leaders, and several diplomats, including COM and representatives from the British, French, German, Italian, and Japanese embassies.

[1](#)3. (U) NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe read a brief statement at the conference and stated that the NLD had strongly desired to attend the Convention and had offered the SPDC "minimal conditions" for NLD participation. He said that the NLD had achieved an agreement with the regime on the right of political parties to choose their own delegates to the Convention and made limited progress on allowing debate and discussion on substantive portions of the draft constitution. However, he said that SPDC authorities had not clarified how they would implement free debate at the Convention, nor had they agreed to open NLD offices immediately or release NLD Vice Chairman U Tin Oo and General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi.

[1](#)4. (U) U Aung Shwe concluded his statement, to thunderous applause from party members and supporters, by saying that "the NLD does not believe it will be able to benefit the nation by participating; therefore, it has been decided that the NLD will not attend the National Convention."

[1](#)5. (C) Following the reading of statement, P/E chief talked briefly with Hkun Htun Oo, leader of the SNLD and chairman of the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) coalition of pro-democracy ethnic parties, who joined a joint UNA-NLD meeting after the press conference. Asked what approach the pro-democracy ethnics parties would take to the question of participation in the Convention, Hkun Htun Oo stated "the same as the NLD."

[1](#)6. (C) NLD leaders tell us that they issued their statement on the basis that registration for the Convention closed today, May 14. However, COM also spoke with NLD CEC members U Lwin and U Nyunt Wei who intimated that the NLD was engaging in a game of brinkmanship with the regime. They allowed that if the regime signaled its intent to talk over the weekend, the NLD would be prepared to listen. "The Convention doesn't begin for three days," said U Nyunt Wei, "the ball is now in (the regime's) court."

[1](#)7. (C) Comment: Although the NLD statement was unambiguous, several scenarios could unfold over the coming days. The SPDC will plow ahead with the Convention and has no intention of postponing opening ceremonies on May 17. However, a boycott by the NLD and the leading ethnic parties poses a serious challenge to the regime's road map. Authorities could respond with a renewed crackdown on the democratic opposition (ref A), or they could continue quiet negotiations to entice NLD and UNA participation. Given that further clarification is unlikely prior to May 17, we advise that in the interim the Department continue calls for the release of NLD leaders and for all parties to be allowed to participate in the reconciliation process, but refrain from direct commentary on the National Convention itself. End comment.
Martinez